I Love You

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I Love You

by TigerPrawn

Summary

Aiden and Nigel find their newly rekindled relationship tested by the past.

Sequel to I Miss You

Chapter 1

It was the middle of Sunday night and Nigel and Aiden had spent the weekend making up for those many lost years. They'd eaten, snuggled whilst watching the end of the movie they'd abandoned on Friday night. They'd made out like teenagers and given each other a succession of unforgettable orgasms.

Nigel wasn't sure he'd be able to get out of bed in the morning, much less go through his work day as more than a zombie. It had been a fair few years since he'd spent a whole weekend in carnal entanglements and he wasn't a teenager any more!

It had seemed a smart idea to set his alarm extra early in order to allow time to get back to his place and get ready before heading to work. So when his phone went off in the darkness, he figured that was it. It took him a moment to focus and realise it was not the alarm, the phone

was ringing. He didn't know the number, but it could be one of the shelters with an emergency involving one of his kids, so he answered cautiously.

Aiden stirred next to him as he spoke quietly, “Hello?”

“Hello Nigel,” Nigel hadn’t expected to hear that cold drawl ever again.

“Darko,” He acknowledged and then waited.

He could hear the man sucking his teeth before responding further, “I’ve made a new friend, says he knows you. Randall, nice kid huh?”

Nigel bit back a growl and stopped himself from a knee jerk reaction, but getting belligerent right now wouldn't help. One of his kids getting mixed up with his old dealing partner was pretty much his worst fucking nightmare.

“Leave him be Darko. He’s just a kid.”

There was a cold chuckle, ended by an inhale that sounded like the draw on a cigarette. Darko exhaled before responding coolly, “Of course brother, I just need one favour from you. For old time’s sake.”

Nigel’s jaw tightened and he felt Aiden’s gentle hand on his shoulder. He turned to see the concerned expression.

He felt like he’d just got his fucking life back without even realising he’d been living in limbo the last five years. He should just tell Darko to fuck off.

But Randall?

Anger burned inside him, and he growled “What do you want?”

Darko chuckled.

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Nigel had been shaking with rage when he hung up the phone, listening to every cold word that Darko said. He’d been a fool to think he could ever escape that life.

Aiden had sat there watching with concern, reaching out to place a hand on Nigel’s as he asked what happened. Nigel didn’t have it in him to talk about it there and then. Not least because he didn’t want to ruin the weekend they had spent together with this reminder of the man Nigel had once been. Instead he had shaken his head and promised to explain everything to Aiden the next day if he’d meet for dinner after work.

There can be a lot of money in drugs. Nigel knows this. It’s a great motivator as long as you’re not snorting or injecting your profits or produce.

Nigel used to convince himself that he had found a balance given that his profits were still pretty good. But it was simply the case that he made enough that sampling the product just

didn't make that much of a dent. If it had, would he have stopped sooner?

No, not a chance. The only reason he ended up quitting all of that, the life, the club, the drugs, was because his life fell apart when his ex left.

Nigel stubbed out his cigarette in the ashtray at the centre of the small table in the al fresco dining area of the bistro he and Aiden had gone on their date. When he sighed, Aiden reached across the table and took his hand just as he had the night before. There was a slight hesitancy there, unused to public affection these days. But Nigel reassured him by squeezing his hand and holding it tight. It was easy to forget after everything, that this was actually all so new.

"You don't have to tell me anything that-" Aiden started but stopped when Nigel shook his head.

"I try not to dwell on it, but since we began talking again I've had it in my mind to tell you. Just never came up. I haven't exactly wanted to spoil our time together to explain everything that happened."

Aiden was silent but wide-eyed as he nodded and waited.

Nigel let out another sigh and Aiden rubbed his thumb over the back of his hand.

"I don't know if you ever really knew how bad it was," Nigel started, feeling his chest ache as he spoke. "You probably suspected a lot of things, but I tried hard to keep it from you. The drugs were one thing, I know you knew about that. But by the time you left I was taking so much that I was still pretty functional whilst high. But to maintain that, to be able to afford that, I had to keep bringing in the cash."

Aiden closed his eyes and took in a deep breath as though preparing himself. It broke Nigel's heart to see it.

"I'm sorry, I'm just… I can never apologise enough for-"

"No," Aiden opened his eyes and shook his head. "It's not… Nigel, I knew you were trouble the day I met you. There weren't any secrets in the beginning. I just wish that I'd been able to help you, maybe if I'd stayed-"

Nigel shook his head and cut Aiden off, "No, you leaving was the wake up call for me. If you'd have stayed I'd have just carried on. I'd have gotten in deeper whilst taking you for granted. And you're right, there weren't any secrets in the beginning. You knew I ran the club with Darko, you knew that sometimes there were drugs involved. But then it changed, over those years together it went from occasionally taking to dealing, to helping Darko build a damn empire from that club and I tried so hard to keep it all from you."

"You didn't succeed," Aiden admitted, looking guilty for the fact. "I didn't know all of it, but enough to know you were taking a lot and you had started dealing. I suspected that the club was being used as a front but I wanted to be blind to it. I didn't want to lose you."

“Fuck,” Nigel muttered under his breath and turned away. How many lovers ended up in situations like this? Turning a blind eye so as to keep hold of what little they had.

“It was only as we grew farther apart, as you took more and I… by then I was starting to realise the issues with my gender identity and as much as I wanted to be there for you, I needed you to be there for me. And you weren’t so I left.” Silent tears were rolling down Aiden’s cheeks when Nigel looked back and he reached out to dry them.

“I should have stayed,” Aiden lamented again, “I should have stopped being blind to it and tried to-”

“There was nothing you could have done, gorgeous. In some ways, you leaving was the second best thing that ever happened to me.” Nigel smiled fondly as he said it and stroked his thumb over Aiden’s cheek until he smiled too.

Inevitably, Aiden asked, “what’s the first best thing?”

“Meeting you again, this. Being here right now. I’m never going to take you for granted again, darling.” Nigel confessed as he studied Aiden’s beautiful face. Not the same one he had fallen in love with all those years ago, but still the same person. A better version, just as he was a better version of himself now. Maybe if he believed in fate he’d believe that this was meant to happen. That they were meant to go on this tumultuous journey together.

And the more he looked at Aiden the more he wanted him. The deeper back in love he fell with this amazing person, the more physical that love felt. If the discussion they were having wasn’t so heavy, he might have started to get hard. As it was he leaned across the table and pressed a chaste kiss to Aiden’s lips.

When Nigel sat back, Aiden chuckled lightly and shook his head, “I honestly never imagined this would happen. Us, back together. You sober and me… That you would want me.”

“I think the weekend must have proved how much I want you,” Nigel teased and was rewarded with a blush across Aiden’s cheeks. Fuck, he loved that.

The tension broken, Nigel cleared his throat and continued.

“When you left I was done. Darko expected me to go off the rails for a bit, but I didn’t. It was like I snapped out of a fucking trance I’d been in. I told him I wanted out, that he could buy my shares in the club but he wasn’t having any of it. I carried on working with him, tried to make out like nothing had changed but inside I was dying. It was killing me being there when all I wanted to do was find you, go after you.” Nigel lit another cigarette and took a drag before continuing.

“I tried to go cold turkey and didn’t last the weekend. I thought I was going to fucking die, and it nearly put me off trying. But that’s when I knew I couldn’t do it on my own. All those years of you trying to be supportive and I had wasted it. I contacted an addicts group and got assigned a mentor, she helped me. Alana, she’s my boss now. She helped me prepare to make the changes in my life that I needed to make in order to really quit.”

“I moved, just to a little place, all I could afford at the time. But I needed to break away from that part of my life. I talked to Darko, told him I really was done, and then I gave him my shares. He wouldn’t buy them, but he couldn’t refuse them. Otherwise I’d just give them to someone else. I walked away and cut contact with him that day. I always expected him to come after me one way or another, but he never did. Should have changed my phone number, but I couldn’t, I needed that one last thing that tied me to you.”

Nigel took in a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“I’m glad you didn’t change it,” Aiden smiled and spoke encouragingly.

“I nearly left the city, but I couldn’t. As far as I knew you might have moved to the other side of the world, but I needed the comfort of maybe running into you some day. Alana wasn’t a fan, called it a crutch, but we worked with it. She got me into a clinic, it was hard work, but I got clean. And then I was out and into a regular programme and working as a bouncer and warehouse security. Whatever work I could get. After a couple of years I started to volunteer with Alana’s programme and then took some training courses, and now that’s my job. Helping people like me. And I love it,” Nigel spoke emphatically, “especially with the younger ones, getting them out of that life before it can really get it’s claws into them. And now, Randall…”

Nigel’s voice broke with the emotion of it all. Randall had a shitty start in life, alcohol from a young age and quickly scaled up to hard drugs and he was one of the more difficult ones to keep in the programme. It wasn’t like they could physically force these kids to stay clean, but this was something Nigel had never imagined.

“Now Darko is involved,” Aiden urged.

Nigel nodded, “seems so. I expect it was just a coincidence, I can’t imagine that Randall is the only one of the kids in the programme that has ended up at that club one way or another. But I’ve never mentioned it. Maybe Randall mentioned my name and Darko saw an opportunity.”

“What does he want you to do?” Aiden asked, cautious and quiet.

“He wants my help on a deal. He says he needs someone of my calibre… I… Aiden, I hurt people. If people didn’t pay then sometimes… That’s what he wants. He wants muscle.”

Aiden’s smile was a half grimace as he looked away, thoughtful.

“I thought, I mean, I assumed over the years… You’d come home with bloody knuckles or a black eye. And I just-”

“Shh,” Nigel soothed but didn’t dare reach out, scared that Aiden would recoil from him. “You weren’t prepared to see that side of me, just as I wasn’t prepared to see parts of who you were. I’m sorry, I’m-”

“Did you ever,” Aiden swallowed and looked back, a tremor there, “did you ever really seriously injure anyone? Did you ever kill anyone?”

Nigel's eyes went wide, "no, no. Fuck no," he replied quickly as he shook his head. "Just smacking people around as warnings. Maiming and killing the customers wouldn't really be good for continued business."

Nigel closed his eyes, trying not to let the memories resurface. He had been riddled with guilt when he started to get clean. Especially given that part of him had enjoyed being the thug. In his altered state of mind and the equal high of being in this position of power over someone, it had been thrilling in a way. And the thought of that made him sick to his stomach. The thought of Aiden seeing that side of him scared the shit out of him.

"I wish I could do something to make amends," Nigel said quietly, looking down.

Relief washed over him when Aiden's hands took his and gripped him tight.

"So what are you going to do now? What are you going to do about Darko?"

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Aiden has to come to terms with what happens next.

Vivian's face dropped the moment she saw him and it nearly made Aiden wince. Was he really that transparent?

He couldn't smile. He could barely keep his mouth from turning down at the corners. Barely keep the tears from the corner of his eyes.

By the time she reached him, Viv's expression had gone from questioning, through concerned to angry. She dropped into the seat opposite him and fixed him with a glare.

"Okay, what's he done?"

Aiden did wince then.

Viv had known him for so long, and had known Nigel and what their relationship had been like. Aiden knew she was trying to keep an open mind, and he had told her pretty much everything that had been going on once he and Nigel had started talking again and she couldn't help but be cautious. He had appreciated it, those words of warning. But he had also explained more than once how Nigel had turned his life around and wasn't an addict any more. How he had changed more than Aiden had in so many ways.

How he was now the man that Aiden had always hoped he could be. The man for him.

So Viv's reaction was disappointing even if he completely understood it. At least his defensiveness pulled him back from the brink of a deep sadness that it would be hard to surface from.

"It's not Nigel," Aiden felt a little hoarse, "it's an old friend of his. Trying to blackmail him back into dealing-"

Viv rolled her eyes and shook her head.

"Really, Aiden? Really? How do you know this isn't just some sort of set up? Maybe he's been using all this time and wanted to have a way to make you believe he was simply being dragged back into that life." Viv replied emphatically.

Her words gave Aiden pause for the slightest moment. He'd had plenty of doubts and concerns whilst they'd been getting to know each other again, but he had never doubted

Nigel's sobriety. There was no way Aiden wouldn't know. He knew exactly what Nigel was like when using, as much as Nigel tried to hide it from him.

Even so, if Viv had said this weeks or months ago then he might have thought more on it, but as it was he knew absolutely and shook his head.

"No, Viv. I really mean it when I say he has changed. He's sober. He's… he's a good guy. And I really want you to meet him again and see for yourself how much better he is, how happy he makes me. But I understand your reaction."

Viv drew in a deep breath and narrowed her eyes at him, studying him for a moment before nodding. Her frown easing.

"Okay, baby. I believe you. I trust your judgement," she let out a quiet sigh, cooling down. "So what's going on?"

Aiden breathed his own sigh of relief and reached over the table to take her hand, she squeezed his fingers.

He drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly before speaking.

"You never met the guy Nigel used to work for, I only met him a few times and he was, is, bad news. He's blackmailing Nigel to go back to work for him and I'm not sure how I handle it." Aiden would have wrung his hands had Viv not been holding tight to one.

"You tell Nigel, no. Even if it means Nigel gets into trouble, it's best that he be in trouble with the police than back into that life," Viv started but stopped when Aiden grimaced and shook his head.

"The threat isn't against Nigel. I think if it were, then that's exactly what he would do. If Darko had something on him that might cause him trouble with the law then Nigel would step up. But that's not it. It's a kid Nigel knows, Darko has him. And he's threatening his well being if Nigel won't agree to what Darko wants."

Viv's jaw and hand tightened.

"Fuck," she spat under her breath. "I get that he's a good guy now and that you both seem incapable of living without each other. But fuck, I wish you'd stayed away from him. I knew the first time you told me about him that he'd be trouble."

"Viv, whether I'm in the picture or not, this kid is in trouble."

"You're right, shit. Sorry. I just… I don't get shitheads like this. But I guess, you need to go to the police. Get Nigel to tell them everything."

Aiden winced at that and shook his head.

"I don't think that's the best option. Randall, the kid, he's clearly fallen into something and he deserves someone's help to get out of it and back on his feet. If the police get involved he'll just end up another kid in the system and he'll never get clean, besides…"

Aiden trailed off and frowned as he looked at Viv, she let out a heavy sigh knowing what was coming next.

“I don’t want to deal with the police, not after what happened at Pride.”

Viv gave a comforting smile and a nod of understanding.

It had been at Pride two years earlier that their friend Margot had gotten a little tipsy. And genuinely that’s all she was. Viv hadn’t been drinking but Aiden was tipsy too and they were making their way from the parade to one of the bars for some dinner when some random assholes decided to get in their faces.

There was a police presence, there to stop trouble, and Aiden had assumed they were there to stop the queerbashing, not add to it.

Two officers had been at the end of the street when the fight broke out. One of the guys had made a vulgar pass at Margot and she told him she wasn’t interested. He then got mouthy, saying she wouldn’t be a lesbian any more if he fucked her, he’d turn her straight.

It might have ended well enough there, but Margot was riled up and told the man to suck her fucking dick.

That had been the trigger point. Once the man realised Margot was trans he punched her in the face. Aiden jumped on him trying to stop him and then the police arrived and broke them up.

When the incident was relayed, the police charged Margot for being drunk and disorderly and let the guy off with a warning. They then proceeded to misgender her the whole time. If it had been Aiden in Margot’s place the incident would have broken him, it was bad enough even being involved. But Margot was made of stronger stuff.

After it was all over she put in a complaint and the two officers were reprimanded and she was given some compensation, which was something at least. But it had left them all wary of the police, and Aiden had no interest in getting them involved in this. An ex-addict and a trans man trying to get their help? On a bad day they’d probably end up the ones behind bars.

“I fucking hate that you guys can’t even trust the fucking police,” Viv’s voice was low but her rage was clear. “Maybe I can help? Use some of this cishet privilege I’ve got going on?”

Aiden smiled and shook his head, “thanks. I think we’re just going to have to handle it ourselves.”

“How?”

Aiden shrugged.

“I don’t know yet. Nigel’s trying to come up with something and I guess all I can do is support him. If he has to go back in order to make sure Randall is safe, then I have to support that.”

“And I’ll support you,” Viv squeezed his hand again and this time Aiden couldn’t hold back a few silent tears.

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Aiden got up from the sofa at the quiet knock at his door.

It was late and he had been about to go to bed, so he was sure the visitor could only be one person.

Aiden smiled as he opened the door and saw Nigel standing there, his hair still wet from a shower and a small rucksack over his shoulder.

“Hello, gorgeous,” Nigel murmured as he moved in to press his lips to Aiden’s and then continued into the apartment.

Aiden shut the door and then moved behind Nigel as Nigel dropped the bag to the floor. Aiden slipped his hands around Nigel’s waist and then up to his chest, resting his forehead against the middle of Nigel’s shoulders.

“I’m glad you’re here,” Aiden told him.

“And I was just going to say I hope you don’t mind me dropping by,” Nigel’s tone was gentle and light but tired. “I brought a few things so I could, um, go in the morning.”

Aiden let out a contented hum, “you’re always welcome here.”

“Glad to hear it,” Aiden could hear the smile in Nigel’s words and didn’t resist as he turned in Aiden’s arms until they were facing each other.

Nigel’s fond gaze quickly grew into a slight smirk as he lifted a hand to brush over Aiden’s two days worth of stubble.

When Nigel leaned in to nuzzle against his fuzz, Aiden laughed.

“Are you sure you don’t have a secret furry kink?”

“I don’t know what that is angel, but if it means I fucking love doing this,” he continued to nuzzle, “then I guess I might.”

Aiden chuckled and shook his head, “please don’t google it.”

Nigel pulled back with a raised brow, “but now you’ve gotten me intrigued.”

Aiden laughed harder and Nigel pulled him into his arms, holding him close and tight.

“I’ve decided. I’m going to see Darko tomorrow, go from there,” Nigel spoke softly, rubbing Aiden’s back as Aiden leaned into him.

“Okay,” Aiden nodded, he knew this was coming, what else could Nigel do? What other options were there?

“I just want to spend the night here and not think about it, okay?” Nigel asked and Aiden nodded again before lifting his face to Nigel’s and leaning in for a kiss.

It was chaste and soft. Aiden pulled back.

“I understand, I’ll be here if you-”

“No,” Nigel winced as he said the word. Aiden’s stomach swooped, and not in a good way. “I don’t want you messed up in this. I don’t want Darko to know anything about you, I don’t want him to have more leverage.”

Nigel’s voice betrayed how desperate he was, how scared he was, for Aiden more so than himself.

Aiden nodded and tried to keep a stiff upper lip.

“It means we need to stay away from each other until this is all resolved,” Nigel said the words Aiden had been dreading but knew they were coming all the same.

Aiden nodded again, silent tears rolling down his cheeks which Nigel brushed away with his thumbs as he cupped his face.

“I fucking hate this, but I have to-”

“I know,” Aiden reassured. “I know, and I’ll be here when it’s all over.”

Nigel let out a shuddering breath, “so this is goodbye again, for now.”

Aiden sniffed and tried to pull on a smile, “better than the last one though.”

“True enough,” Nigel pulled him close again. “I just want to hold you all night and not think about tomorrow until I have to. Want to just savour being here with you.”

Aiden pulled away, taking hold of Nigel’s hand and leading him through to the bedroom.

“Let’s make a night to remember,” Aiden tried to tease through his sadness.

“Every night with you is a night to remember,” Nigel breathed the words as they stopped in front of the bed and slowly began to undress.

An article of clothing or two later they were kissing, just sweet, tender kisses and touches as they continued to undress.

“You mean everything to me,” Nigel murmured.

Aiden could taste their tears on his lips as they both lowered to the bed.

“Hold me,” Aiden asked, his voice shaky.

Nigel crawled over him and lowered himself down to his elbows, framing Aiden as his arms went up around his neck to pull him down into a tender kiss.

They gasped into each other's mouth as Nigel gently slid inside Aiden and their bodies pressed as close together as two humans could possibly get.

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Aiden woke to Nigel's phone ringing.

It was lit up with a call and vibrating on the bedside table.

Aiden was immediately awake and excruciatingly aware that Nigel's side of the bed was cold. They'd been up for hours crying, talking, making love and now Nigel had left without saying goodbye before finally falling to sleep.

The sadness of it was almost unbearable but they had already had their goodbye and it was probably better, less painful, not to draw it out.

Rubbing the sleep from his eyes Aiden reached for his phone and saw the name being displayed was Alana, Nigel's boss. They had never met but Nigel always spoke so highly of her. He mentally prepared himself before accepting the call.

"Nigel? Are you alright?"

"Hi, this isn't Nigel. He's gone… gone away for a while."

"Is this Aiden? What's happened? Nigel left an answerphone message on the office phone saying he wouldn't be able to make it in for the foreseeable future, and that he was sorry. I'm really worried."

"A family emergency," Aiden hated the lie but they didn't want to risk anyone else involving the police. "He's fine, he's not in a bad place." Aiden reassured at least.

"I… I'm sorry, this must be a difficult time for you both. Please send him my good wishes and ask him to update me as soon as he can."

"Sure," Aiden replied and then hung up the phone before his voice cracked.

He sat there for a moment fighting back the tears, cradling the phone in his lap.

Nigel had explained he had bought a burner phone and only Darko had the number. No way to contact each other at all.

The memory surfaced of that drunken message that had put them in touch all those months ago, and now there would be nothing. Not until Nigel was able to come back to him, however long that might take.

With a sob, Aiden switched off Nigel's phone.

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Nigel revisits his past in the hopes of saving his future.

Five months later

Nigel woke slowly. It felt like he'd barely had any sleep at all.

Between being up until the club closed at 4am, and the shitty cotbed in the campervan he was living in, sleep was a luxury he didn't get often these days.

He was too old for this shit and ached all over. Mornings like this made him long for his apartment, or better yet, Aiden's.

Nigel hadn't wanted to leave any kind of trail, anything that Darko could use more than he already had done. So he had sublet his apartment to a friend in the programme and had spent his savings on a beat up old camper that he parked out the back of the club.

Darko wasn't stupid, he knew what Nigel had done and had told him as much. Laughing in Nigel's face the whole time as though it was an overreaction that he had totally upheaved his life.

But fuck, if Darko ever managed to worm himself into more of Nigel's life, if he ever even thought Aiden's name, then Nigel would fucking kill him.

Nigel wriggled in the narrow cot until he was on his back, slinging an arm over his face as the sun dazzled through the thin curtains. His mind was filled with Aiden.

What little sleep he'd managed had been laced with vivid and strange dreams of them being together again but with some shadow hanging over them. The dread in the pit of his stomach that followed him whether he was asleep or awake was going to give him an ulcer.

He'd try and get another hour of sleep before heading into the club for another day of Darko's bidding.

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Showered and dressed, Nigel sat at the empty bar and lit a cigarette.

A few staff were around, restocking bottles and cleaning up, ready to reopen in the evening and he revelled in the peace of it. Darko would join him shortly and apparently today was when Nigel needed to be on his a-game.

Darko had never told anyone that Nigel had ducked out of the club. They had been part of an incredibly precise and delicate food chain and so Darko had simply continued to manage their club, explaining that Nigel had gone home to Romania to take care of some family business.

That lie was only going to stretch so far, and Darko had been lucky. Not only that no one had ever questioned this, but also with the chance meeting with Randall that had brought Darko back to Nigel's door.

Fucking Randall.

Nigel grit his teeth. Poor fucking kid. He worked for Darko now, some dealing here and there, some errands. And the pittance he was paid went straight back into Darko's pocket as the kid snorted it every night.

And there was nothing Nigel could do. Not until he could work out how to get them both out of there.

He had tried. Those first couple of weeks, he'd tried to get Darko to just let someone come and get the kid and leave him out of it all. But Darko wanted his leverage and the more Nigel tried to convince him, the further Randall's wages stretched until he was on the fucking verge of overdosing each night. In the end, Nigel realised if he continued trying to get the kid out he'd end up fucking dead. So he stopped trying to get Darko to let him go, and Darko stopped giving Randall so much blow.

Nigel tried to find him every night to make sure he was okay, but sometimes Randall simply wasn't around and each time Nigel worried he was dead in a ditch.

This was no fucking way for either of them to live.

"Hey brother," Darko slapped him on his back and took the stool next to him at the bar, signalling for the girl cleaning the glasses to bring them a bottle of whiskey.

Nigel's jaw tightened. So far he had managed to avoid the drugs but Darko wouldn't allow him to refuse alcohol. Made him a real man in Darko's eyes. Nigel had to stay focused on Randall and not think about that itching under his skin from being around so many drugs.

He'd fucking hated what it had done to him, looking back. But his body still remembered the high, still craved it. It took everything in him to resist day after day, knowing that he had to stay clean, stay level headed, if this was going to end well.

"Joe is coming tonight," Darko confirmed as the drinks were set in front of them and Darko knocked his back immediately. "I want you on your best behaviour."

"Always," Nigel growled, lifting his own glass but only taking a sip.

"Pussy," Darko sneered as he eyed the glass but then continued. "If he suspects you've been gone this whole time, he'll have both our balls. He only continued to supply the club because he's fond of you. Fucking guy hates me."

“I wonder why,” Nigel mumbled before downing the rest of his drink and wincing at the burn. “If you’d fucking told him when I left you might have been able to come to an arrangement. Do you know what he’d do to you now? If he knew you’d been lying to him for five years? Making a fool of him, as he’d see it. You’d be at the bottom of the river by the end of the night.”

“Why do you think you’re here?” Darko snarled and narrowed his eyes. “And don’t get any cute fucking ideas. I’ve got Matthew with Randall every fucking moment of the day and night. You start anything then it’s Randall at the bottom of the river. Get me?”

Nigel took in a breath, needing to try and calm himself as much as possible.

“Is it just Joe?” He asked, coldly.

“Coming tonight? No, his usual entourage. You might not have met a couple of them before--”

“No, not tonight. Is it just Joe that you lied to?”

Darko let out a bark of laughter, “fuck no. If I was lying to one of them I had to lie to all of them. The whole fucking seedy community of drug runners in this part of the world all think you were away taking care of family business.”

Nigel shook his head and let out a long breathe, “you’re fucking lucky you’ve never been found out. I never left the city, I could have run into any of them at any time.”

“You didn’t, and that is most definitely lucky for you.”

“More so for you,” Nigel growled and put his hand over his glass as Darko signalled for the girl to refill them both.

Darko drank his down and then stood from the stool.

“Just be ready later, turn on that fucking charm they love so much. Or Randall is going to have a very rough night.”

“What the fuck happened to you?” Nigel blurted the words before he could help himself. “When we started this we were just stupid kids who got lucky. We partied and wanted others to party too. Then the dealing took off and the money came in, but we were never like this. Never ruthless and cruel like this.”

Darko huffed, amused. “You’ve not been here, brother. The money got really good, better every year. And money makes monsters of us all.”

Nigel shook his head. He had liked Darko once.

No, he’d fucking loved him like a brother. But this man here, now? Nigel wouldn’t piss on him if he were on fire.

Nigel's reaction clearly pissed Darko off, as the man then got in his face, a pointed finger between them.

"Just be fucking ready."

"I was fucking born ready, Darko. You don't need to tell me shit."

With another huff Darko turned on his heel and stalked out of the bar and towards his office.

Nigel watched him go, wishing that Randall wasn't part of this equation. Darko had never intimidated Nigel, they'd known each other too long. And even now Nigel fancied his odds if he were to lay the man out, but it wasn't just his neck on the line.

He had to think of Randall.

Nigel tried to focus on that thought, but soon another one crept in, one that he tried to keep hidden throughout the day.

That he had to do it for Aiden as well. He had to get home to Aiden, he couldn't do this to him again.

*

Nigel had never liked Joe.

He was one of those people who seemed jovial and affable enough, and that was all well and good if you stayed on side. Nigel had seen more than once what happened to those who didn't. And in that respect he couldn't blame Darko for not ever coming clean about Nigel leaving.

Sure, Joe liked Nigel much more than he liked Darko. That could be said of a great number of people. He might not have been happy about Nigel leaving, but business was business. If Darko had told him in the very beginning then he'd have probably gotten over it.

What Joe wouldn't likely get over was Darko having been lying to him all these years.

As Nigel greeted the man like an old friend his mind continued the thoughts that had been occupying him all day. Was there a way to drop Darko in it with Joe? And if there was, would Nigel do that? Was this their way out?

At his worst, Nigel had done things he wasn't proud of. He'd hurt people and in some ways, at the time, he'd enjoyed it. But could he actually set Darko up knowing that Joe would likely have the man killed?

Could he live with that?

Part of him, the part that was only thinking of Aiden and Randall absolutely fucking could. But too much of him knew that he didn't want that on his conscience. He'd already worked through enough of his past to not want to add to it. But there had to be some way to use this situation, it might be the only leverage Nigel had over Darko.

“Good to see you, m’boy,” Joe pulled him into a one-armed embrace. “Took your time in coming home to us. Sick mother was it?”

Nigel clenched his jaw and nodded. Darko had of course filled him in on the particulars of his lies, that Nigel had returned to Romania to look after his mother and was now back after her passing.

There was something all the more disgusting about the lie when Darko had known Nigel’s mother, and knew that she had died when he was barely twenty. Back before either of them had even thought beyond the gangs of Bucharest.

Darko caught his eye as Nigel stepped back from Joe, and the expression there made Nigel want to tell Joe everything.

There was a smugness to Darko’s countenance that turned Nigel’s stomach. What the fuck had happened to that wayward kid he’d grown up with?

“It’s good to be back,” Nigel mumbled as they all began to take their seats at the large meeting table in Darko’s office. One of the wait staff from the bar brought through their drinks and once they had all raised a glass to each other, discussions began.

“I’m glad to see you back,” Joe told Nigel, ignoring Darko completely. “I’ve always enjoyed doing business with you.”

“I appreciate it,” Nigel tried to smile, trying to channel his former self and the charm he’d now be laying on thick.

“Good, good. Because I want to discuss something that has come to my attention. The reason why I’ve been pestering Darko for this meeting for quite some time.” Joe glared at Darko.

Nigel’s blood ran cold. Did he know about Nigel having been gone? Did he know about Aiden?

“I’m all ears,” Nigel replied, smile in place even if his palms were sweaty.

“There have been rumblings for a while about some dealing happening out of Club Tropicoco,” Joe began.

Nigel had no idea what he was talking about so was thankful when Darko spoke up.

“That new club? Nah, there’s no threat there.”

Joe glared at Darko again and then turned his full attention back to Nigel.

“That new club has now been open three years, and if what I’m hearing is true, they are developing quite a little empire.”

“Nothing for us to worry--” Darko began but was cut off when Joe responded in a booming voice.

“Your sales have been steadily declining. The less you sell, the less you buy from me. The less you buy from me the more I have to wonder if you are worth doing business with.”

Darko looked suitable cowed and Nigel reacted in the way he knew he was expected to.

“You want us to handle this club,” it wasn’t a question.

“Frankly, I’m surprised you haven’t already. I know Darko always liked to hide behind your brawn, but I’m sure he could have found a few ruffians in his employ to go over and set them straight. And now instead you have a rival club and I am certain that they are being supplied by one of my own rivals. This is not an acceptable situation. This side of the city is only so big.”

Nigel nodded, “I completely understand. Don’t worry, Joe. Consider it handled.”

Joe’s face broke into a broad smile, “I knew you and I would be on the same page.”

Joe downed the rest of his drink and shook his glass to show that he was happy to stay for at least one more.

“That gorgeous wife of yours, she go with you to Romania?” Joe asked, shop talk now over.

Nigel had managed to keep his private life separate from the club, hell, he’d never even let Darko into his private life once they left Bucharest even though they had practically grown up together. He had wanted to protect it, to protect Gabi, not that that had panned out.

From the moment they’d met, he had begun an increasingly double life. Nigel at the club and Gabi’s husband.

Even so, he’d had pictures of Gabi in his office and had mentioned her here and there when directly asked, as was inevitable. Joe was a family man, so he was one who had always asked.

Nigel clenched his jaw, “actually, we’re not together any more.”

The lie in it made his heart ache.

“That is a shame,” Joe murmured. But then another drink was set in front of him and he began to ask about Bucharest and Romania more generally.

It wasn’t until an hour later when Joe and his people left that both Nigel and Darko seemed to breathe a sigh of relief.

“Thank you, brother,” Darko said, resting a hand on Nigel’s shoulder. “Maybe there is some way I can repay you.”

“You can let me take Randall and go,” Nigel growled.

Darko let out a hearty laugh and then slapped him on the back. “No, I was thinking more along the lines of setting you up with some fresh pussy. Or, if you’re still hung up on the ex,

perhaps we can track her down. Remind her what a catch you are."

There was an undeniable threat in those words, a reminder that there was more leverage out there that Darko might try to acquire.

Darko continued to chuckle, but Nigel just stepped away, saying nothing. He wanted to rip Darko's tongue out for even talking about Aiden, or Gabi as Darko assumed. But he knew he was better off staying quiet and hoping the topic didn't come up again.

Or at least not before Nigel had more time to get the lay of the land, to work out the weaknesses and find a way out of this whole situation. The answer was of course obvious, he could out the lie to all of Darko's contacts, he just had to work out if he could live with himself after what they would do to Darko as a result.

Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Aiden is struggling to cope.

Aiden let out a low hum as he rolled onto his back, slowly stirring from his sleep and the dream he was having.

His hand found his way under his briefs and began to rub at his cock as the dream lingered. Nigel on top of him, slowly moving inside him. Both their bodies rocking together as they kissed sensually.

Aiden roused a little more, the dream now just a memory. One that he tried to hold onto as he continued to stroke his cock.

He came panting Nigel's name, tears filling his eyes.

It had been months, and Aiden had to carry on through his day like a shadow. Perfunctory in everything he did. Everything except his dreams, in which Nigel often appeared. Comforting and loving him.

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"Penny for them," Bella said gently as she slid into the booth opposite Aiden.

The bar was quiet, having just opened for the day and before the lunchtime rush on this overcast Friday. Aiden had taken a few days off to work on his comics, or at least try. But he knew he wouldn't. He couldn't do anything creative whilst still so worried about Nigel.

Aiden looked up at Bella and she gave him a comforting smile, reading his expression. It wasn't the first time she'd seen him looking so glum lately. In fact that was all he ever seemed to be. They all knew Nigel had gone, that there had been some emergency and Aiden didn't know when he was coming home. But Aiden knew, every one suspected there was more to it than that one way or the other.

"There's nothing I can do to make you feel better, so I'm just going to buy you a drink," Bella said, reaching across and squeezing his hand.

"Thanks. I just needed some company today and Viv is away."

"Oh, I see," Bella chuckled, "we're second choice."

“No, I just… hate being a burden to everyone.”

“You’re not a burden, Aiden.” She squeezed his hand again and then relaxed back into the seat.

“I just… I know I’m miserable and I hate exposing people to it. Especially Viv. She was there for me the first go around with this. When I left Nigel years ago. She shouldn’t have to deal with this shit again.”

Bella gave him a sympathetic look, “but it’s not the same situation is it?” It wasn’t really a question and she looked at him sternly. “I know you’ve not told us everything, and that’s okay. But clearly Nigel left for some serious reason, and I get the impression you don’t know if he’s coming back. You both still care for each other, this isn’t the same as it was all those years ago, and you aren’t the same people-”

Bella stopped when Aiden started to cry, lowering his face into his hands.

“I miss him so much. Even before we got back together, we messaged constantly once we got back in touch. I just don’t know what to do without him in my life and… I’m so scared. I’m so terrified something will happen to him.”

The sound of drinks being set down on the table made Aiden look up to find that Santa had brought over drinks for the three of them.

He slid into the booth next to Aiden, partially obscuring him from the small number of other patrons in the bar. A move that was unexpected but for which Aiden was instantly grateful as he dried his eyes.

“Hey, come on kid. It can’t be as bad as all that,” Santa said, a comforting hand on Aiden’s shoulder before pushing his drink in front of him. “What is there to be scared about?”

Aiden let out a trembling sigh. He needed to talk about this, and he knew he could trust Bella and Jack as much as he could trust Viv. He’d known them a while now and Bella and the trans group had seen him through so much already.

“You can’t repeat this to anyone.” Aiden told them, noting how Bella and Santa immediately exchanged worried glances.

“Are you in some kind of trouble, honey?” Bella asked.

“No,” Aiden shook his head. “It’s Nigel… someone from his past is blackmailing him. Making him work for him and… it’s not legal. The stuff he’s being made to do.”

“Fuck,” Santa muttered under his breath. “We wondered what was going on, but we’d have never thought… Has he been in touch at all? Is he okay?”

Aiden shook his head again, trying to hold back the tears. “He left his phone with me and cut all contact with everyone in his life. He didn’t want to drag any of us into it.”

“He wanted to keep you safe,” Bella said softly.

Aiden nodded and the tears rolled hot down his cheeks again.

“Shit, son.” Santa shook his head. “We must be able to help somehow. Can’t you go to the police?”

Aiden winced and shook his head, to which he received sympathetic looks. A black queer couple likely hadn’t had great experiences with the police either.

“Even if I trusted the police enough to go to them, Nigel would end up in trouble. And it’s not just Nigel. One of the kids he helped through the programme he works at is involved. He… Nigel needs to keep him safe.”

“It’s drugs?” Santa asked.

Aiden nodded solemnly as Bella and Santa shared a look, conveying so much without saying anything the way some couples could.

“Can we use the bar to help in some way?” Santa suggested. “Have them do some dealing here and we call the cops. Entrapment, I guess. Don’t get me wrong, there’s no love between me and the police, but if we can use them… call them when we see what’s going down. Take them red handed?”

Aiden shook his head, loving that his friends wanted to help like this but knowing that there was just no way it would work.

“You’re just so… so amazing to offer. But it’s bigger than that. They are higher on that food chain, it just wouldn’t work. Besides, I wouldn’t want you guys getting involved.”

“We are involved,” Bella interjected. “We’re your friends.”

Aiden managed a smile at that and nodded. “I appreciate you so much. But it just wouldn’t work.”

“Fuck,” Santa spat the word and downed his drink. His eyes moved over to the bar where the crowd was starting to pick up and their one server was starting to get busy.

“Go,” Aiden insisted. “Just keep the drinks flowing.”

“I can do that,” Santa replied with a grin.

*

Aiden woke with a slamming headache. It hadn’t been a late night, purely because he had been completely plastered by the time he left the bar at around five in the evening. He took a taxi home then passed out on the sofa.

He regretted not having grabbed a glass of water before doing so now that he was awake, the sound of the metallic sound of the letterbox closing had woken him.

The sound confused him at first, because mentally it felt like Sunday, given that he'd been out drinking since brunch the day before. But then he remembered it was actually Saturday and so it was just the usual post being spat through the letterbox.

It was enough to get him staggering to his feet and over to the kitchen. After downing two glasses of water and trying not to throw it back up, Aiden found some headache pills and took them too, regretting that he hadn't at least had the forethought to grab a takeaway on the way home so he'd have some leftovers right now.

He looked up at the clock on the wall, eleven Saturday morning. That was probably the longest he'd slept since Nigel left. He grabbed some bread and threw it into the toaster before ambling over to the mail scattered on the floor.

Two bills, one junk mail and the other…

The envelope was handwritten and it had been posted from a city a few hours drive away according to the postmark. He was sure he didn't know anyone there, but the handwriting was familiar.

With a frown Aiden tore it open and pulled out the folded note inside. A piece of A5 paper ripped off of a notepad. Two lines written on it, that was all.

A hotel address in the same city as the postmark and a date. Three weeks from now.

The writing, now no longer written so precisely to ensure the postie could read it, was clearly one he knew.

It was from Nigel.

The toaster popped.

Three Weeks Later

Aiden's heart was beating so hard and fast he wondered if this was how a scared rabbit felt. The last three weeks had been the most bearable in a while.

He couldn't let himself believe that this was some sort of ruse or trap. And even if it was it might mean he'd get to see Nigel, so either way it gave him something to focus on for the first time since Nigel had left.

He stopped drinking so much, started taking a bit better care of himself again. It felt like he was pulling himself out of a funk and hadn't realised how deep he'd fallen into it. Even Viv made a semi-joking comment that it was nice he was back to showering daily.

Every day Aiden's mantra had been a countdown to when he would finally see Nigel again, and now the day, the time, the place. It was all happening.

He had taken the train and it had taken almost two hours to get to the city and then another half hour finding the hotel. It was a rundown looking place, one of those budget chains that had seen better days.

Inside it was clean and much better than the outside, if incredibly dated. Aiden was sure the carpet was older than he was.

Aiden stood in the small lobby that had a faintly dusty smell wondering what he was meant to do now. Should he go to reception and ask if Nigel had a room? Would he be using his own name?

The question was answered when he felt someone come up behind him and a low voice mutter, “hello, gorgeous.”

Aiden turned immediately, barely taking in the sight of Nigel before he launched himself into the man’s arms.

They embraced tightly, holding on to each other for dear life.

It seemed like an age before they finally started to release each other by increments, slowly moving back enough to look at each other and drink each other in whilst still gripping hold of each other’s arms.

“You’re here,” Aiden said, stating the obvious.

Nigel chuckled and nodded, “I am. Got here last night.” He jerked his head over to some ancient looking armchairs next to a low coffee table filled with the morning papers in the corner of the lobby. “Been sitting there since seven this morning, watching for you. Hoping you’d come.”

“Of course I came,” Aiden replied, suddenly feeling overwhelmed. He felt his lower lip begin to wobble and tears pooling in his eyes.

“Come on,” Nigel said, wrapping an arm around him and leading him to an elevator. “I got us a room. It’s a shithole, but it’s our shithole for tonight.”

The ride up to the fourth floor felt like a strange dream. Like he was in a daze.

It felt so strange to be here with Nigel, even as it felt so incredibly right.

Aiden could barely hold back the tears as they began down the corridor to the room, realising finally upon seeing him that he really had thought that he would never see Nigel again.

Nigel unlocked the door with an old key, the keyring displaying the room number. 412.

Aiden focused on the minutiae as he tried to ground himself, feeling dizzy as Nigel pushed the door and nodded for Aiden to go ahead.

He walked into the centre of the room, vaguely registering another old carpet, a double bed with an equally hideous bedspread that matched the cheap looking curtains. Another door that looked like it was made of plywood was open to reveal an avocado bathroom suite.

For a moment Aiden was cataloguing it all, until he heard Nigel close and bolt the door behind them.

At that sound Aiden sank to his knees and began to cry. His whole body trembling as he managed to stop himself from wailing. The relief at seeing Nigel alive, the relief from the emotional trauma he had been carrying with him for months, was so overwhelming that Aiden wasn't sure he could ever stop crying.

Strong arms came around him and he felt himself being lifted. The tears still flowed as he was set on the bed and pulled into Nigel's arms, lying there together in a tight embrace until Aiden was too exhausted to keep crying so heavily.

"I'm sorry," Nigel muttered into Aiden's hair as Aiden continued to sob gently.

Aiden shook his head, "No, don't…"

"I've missed you," Nigel told him and more tears flowed.

Aiden nodded his head this time and then buried his face in Nigel's shirt.

"Hey," Nigel reprimanded jovially. "This is my only shirt, don't get me covered in snot."

Aiden laughed then, even as the tears continued to flow. But slowly they subsided along with the laughter.

"I'm sorry," Aiden sniffed. "It's all a bit much. I thought… I was so scared. And now you're here. It's a lot to process."

Nigel nodded. "It is. And I'm sorry. I hate this, I fucking hate it."

Those words brought Aiden back to his senses for the fact that they were not past tense. Nigel wasn't done.

"You're not coming home?"

"No, angel. Not just yet." Nigel confirmed.

Aiden stifled the tears and forced himself to nod, "okay. So what's happening? Are you safe? Is this safe?"

Nigel nodded quickly, "totally safe. I've had a few business meetings here the last couple of months. And it struck me that if I was discrete we could meet here and no one would be any the wiser. Fuck, I've wanted to see you so bad. But I wouldn't have done it if I thought for one second-"

"Shh, I know," Aiden placed a finger over Nigel's lips. "How long do I have you for?"

"Overnight, I need to be back at the club by noon tomorrow."

Aiden nodded, his heart sinking a little. He wanted it to be forever, but he would take just a night.

Nigel hooked a finger under his chin and lifted his gaze.

“Just don’t worry, gorgeous. It will all be over soon and I’ll be able to come home.”

Aiden tried to smile at that, but he couldn’t help but worry that Nigel was just telling him what he wanted to hear.

“I mean it,” Nigel said, reading Aiden’s expression. “I’ve been making friends in high places. Higher than Darko. Just a little more time, some more maneuvering and then I’m out.”

Aiden blinked, unsure what that meant and just as unsure whether he should ask. Whether he wanted to know.

But then time stopped and the world became a bubble of ugly curtains and a lumpy mattress as Nigel leaned in and kissed him ever so tenderly.

Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Will Nigel finally escape Darko's clutches and return to Aiden?

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains homophobia and transphobia towards Aiden and Nigel.

“This club Tropicoco is stealing your business, Joe.” Nigel spoke casually as he lazed back in a chair in Joe’s office. This wasn’t the first time he had been here. In fact he had spent a couple of months working up to this point. Telling Darko he was getting shit sorted rather than laying the ground for a conspiracy against his erstwhile business partner. And one massive step in that plan was manoeuvring Joe into the correct position for this to work.

Instead of sorting out the club as Joe had directed, knowing his meaning had been to rough them up and threaten them until they backed off, Nigel had convinced Joe of the merits of taking a deeper look. Explaining that putting a lean on them wouldn’t solve the image problem this was creating for him.

Joe huffed, “tell me something I don’t know. I think it’s time you stopped messing about and put the hurt on them Nigel. Or I’m going to start to question your loyalties.”

This was the opening Nigel had been waiting for, it was now or never to put this into action.

He’d been mentally working through this plan since the first time he met with Joe on his return to the club. There was no love lost with Darko and maybe this was his way out, if he could live with the potential consequences if it didn’t quite go to plan.

“You’re right to question it Joe. But not my loyalties to you, my loyalties to Darko.” Nigel said, casual as he took another drag on his cigarette.

Joe narrowed his eyes and looked at the two men standing in the room, no doubt making sure these lackeys were once he could trust. Evidently that was the case because Joe turned back to Nigel and cocked his head.

“Is that so?”

“You know we were close, Joe. We grew up like brothers. But whilst I’ve been gone I trusted Darko to manage everything right. If I’d been here, you know that club would have never gotten to this point. Darko isn’t up to this shit. I think it’s time for him to retire.”

Joe raised a brow at that, clearly not expecting Nigel to suggest such a thing. And Nigel knew that to Joe retiring could mean anything from running out of town to throwing in the river with concrete boots.

“You want him out of the picture so you can take a bigger cut?” Joe asked, a little surprise in his tone. Nigel knew his reputation had always been as someone who played hard rather than dirty.

“Actually, no.” Nigel shook his head and chuckled. “I want out. I’m done with all this Joe. My time away, I didn’t want to come back to this shit. I’m sure you know how it goes.”

Joe chuckled and nodded, “Yeah, been there myself a few times. Money’s just too good.”

Nigel gave a knowing nod and took another drag.

“I’m just looking out for your best interests,” Nigel continued. “I want out and I want you to have my share of the club. But I’m not going to leave you with Darko, he’s a liability. I’m looking out for your best interests.”

“That so, hmm? How much are you thinking I should pay for your share?”

“I’ll be honest with you Joe. I just want this done, I didn’t want to come back. You pay me what you think is fair and my half of the club is yours, or we can work it out some other way.”

“And Darko’s half?” Joe’s eyes narrowed, waiting for Nigel to say it.

Nigel swallowed.

He couldn’t. He fucking hated the man but he couldn’t outright advocate for his murder.

“I think he should sell to you too,” Nigel said.

Joe wasn’t expecting that, sitting back in his chair he eyed Nigel up.

“You’ve been putting a lot of thought into this. Dare say I am a cog in this convoluted plan of yours. Not sure how I feel about that.”

“Maybe so, Joe. But I’m not doing anything you wouldn’t do. And I’m being honest with you. I could have sold my fucking half to Darko or some asshole. Then you have them to deal with.”

“Or I could just cut Darko off, let him sink.” Joe countered.

Nigel smiled at that, feeling a *gotcha* deep in his chest.

“You could, Joe. If you like the optics on that. This new club taking your business, our club going under? People will question your business dealings.”

“Careful, Nigel. I like you, but you’re on thin ice.” Joe warned.

Nigel nodded and held up his hands in placation.

“Not trying to offend you, friend. I know you know your stuff. If anything this situation is of Darko’s making. I’m wanting to save you the embarrassment on this.” Nigel took a breath, preparing for what came next. “I’ve taken the liberty to arrange a meeting with the owners of Club Tropicoco. I want to broker a deal. You get Darko out of the picture, take my share and close the club down, then partner with Tropicoco instead. I’ve primed them on the idea and they are interested.”

“You’ve taken a lot of liberties here, Nigel.” Joe’s tone held slightly less of a warning despite the words.

Nigel nodded.

“I know it, but as I said, my loyalty to you has been at the heart of it all my friend. You close out my club, run Darko out of town and take up with Tropicoco. You can spin it all that this was part of a long term plan to get rid of Darko. That you let Tropicoco get away with dealing on your turf so that you could angle Darko out.”

Joe huffed a laugh, his expression showing how quickly his mind was working. It was a perfect fucking idea, all neatly packaged up.

“Your name will be mud,” Joe said, “it’ll be clear you threw your partner under the bus. People won’t trust you like they used to.”

“Like I said, Joe. I’m out. I want to just have a fucking quiet life.”

“And you want this quiet life here? In the city?” There was a note in Joe’s voice that Nigel didn’t like but he’d been prepared for.

“Yeah, that was the idea.”

“Without protection? Might be some friends of Darko will come looking for you and I don’t know that I can help with that. Not without a cost.”

There it was, the protection money that Joe would want. That Nigel knew he was going to have to pay to escape this life for good. He might as well have been living on borrowed time all these years. It felt that something like this had always been inevitable.

“I feel like my half of the club would cover it. Protection for me and mine for as long as I’m in the city. And I’ve got no plans on leaving.”

Joe clapped his hands together and let out a bark of laughter.

“I have missed that mind of yours. You’ve planned this out to the finest detail haven’t you. Don’t think I didn’t notice that you said to run Darko off. And I respect that, he’s a shit, but you’re right, he was a brother to you.” Joe eyed Nigel, considering for a moment.

“You’ve made it impossible to say no to this. As you well know. Well done, you’re missing your calling by leaving all this but, well done. A few years and you could be one of my top guys, but I get it.”

Joe rubbed his hands together and then reached one across. Nigel took it and they shook.

“Set up the meeting with Tropicoco.”

Two Months Later

Work had been a slog. Aiden had been put in charge of a big ad campaign and whilst it was nice to have the responsibility it also took him further away from his passion. He was barely creating any art at work these days, so he channelled it at home instead.

Since meeting at the hotel with Nigel he had a new lease on life. Things felt more positive and it no longer felt like it would be forever. He knew that Nigel could come home any day. Maybe this week or in six weeks or twelve, he would be coming home. He was sure of that.

He had a plan and he’d make it work.

The thought brought a smile to Aiden’s face as he got to his apartment, climbing the steps and thinking about ordering takeout so he could sit down and do some drawing. He’d been working on a new comic since meeting with Nigel. Still werewolves, that was his thing, but a love story about lovers separated across time and distance, finding each other again. He was pouring all his emotion into it and no matter how tired he was when he came home, he would sit down for thirty minutes or three hours to work on it.

Aiden was still smiling as he got to his door, but it quickly faded as he noticed it was already open a crack, the lock broken.

His first thought was to call the police, despite his hesitancy with them. But then he realised that if this was something to do with Nigel, the police were not the best answer. Unfortunately there was no good answer.

He should turn and go, to Santa and Bella or to Viv. But then a voice called from inside.

“Aiden, isn’t it?” He didn’t know the voice but he recognised the accent as so similar to Nigel’s.

Darko?

Shaking, Aiden pushed the door, expecting to find his apartment full of thugs waiting to end this all one way or another.

But it was just a man. He wore a dark suit but it was clearly dirty and ripped, the side of his face that Aiden could see had a bloody lip and a bruise on his cheekbone. A quick glance

confirmed that the apartment was otherwise empty and Darko had apparently been there for a while. Maybe all day. There were food remnants and several empty bottles of beer on the coffee table, he'd made himself right at home.

Darko stood at the bookshelves, looking at some photos there. One was of Aiden and Viv early in Aiden's transition. He didn't pass in that photo but it had been his first Pride out as trans and it held a lot of good memories. It had been a bright and happy day amongst so many dark ones.

Darko chuckled and shook his head before looking up at him.

"I should have fucking known something was going on. Nigel isn't a faggot."

The slur jarred Aiden and made his face heat.

Darko started to wander around then, imposing as he was, he had clearly had the shit kicked out of him and wasn't entirely sober.

"I have to admit, I'd been curious, but I was willing to let it lie. I knew something was up with that fucker and now it all makes sense."

"I don't know what you're talking about." Aiden growled, edging towards the kitchen. If it was just the two of them and Darko was all beat up, then maybe he could easily defend himself.

"Stop," Darko barked, taking a gun out of his jacket and waving it in Aiden's direction.

"You still got a pussy, yeah? Bet he loves that," Darko chuckled.

Aiden grimaced, feeling sick.

"Been suspecting he was up to something for a while so I started paying a PI to follow him on his out of town meetings. Especially the overnight ones. And nothing, nothing after nothing. Legit business meetings. Right? And then he slipped up. He met with you in that hotel. And I was like, the fuck? Nigel isn't a fag? Had to be a mistake. So PI looked into you, overheard Nigel call you Aiden as you said goodbye. Followed you to the station… they have their fucking ways, I paid a lot so you can imagine not all above board." Darko laughed again. "You weren't easy to track down, cost me a lot of fucking money."

"So, you're here to see if Nigel is a fag?" Aiden snapped, trying to stifle his fear with anger.

"Fuck, no sweetheart. We're beyond that. Fucker double crossed me. If I'm not out of this city in the next twelve hours then I'll be dancing on the bottom of the fucking river." Darko's voice raised as he spoke, until he was near screaming at Aiden, hysterical.

"And now it makes fucking sense. You were Gabi, right? Fucking freak." He waved the gun at the photo with Viv. "He always had a fucking picture of you on his desk. But you were too good for us, too good to meet his business crew."

“You don’t know what you’re talking about-” Aiden growled back, stopping when the gun was levelled at him.

“I know I’m going to fucking kill you, bitch. What do I care? I’ll be out of the country before anyone even knows you’re gone.”

Darko cocked the gun.

*

Nigel’s heart was pounding.

It had been for the last seventeen hours. In that time he’d barely eaten, hadn’t slept.

The evening before it had all gone down. The deal with Tropicoco was sealed and Joe turned up at their club to give Darko his marching orders. When Darko had expected Nigel to back him up, he’d had a surprise. Then he had resisted and despite Nigel begging him to fucking leave before they just killed him, he fought back. They beat the shit out of him and gave him a day to get out of the city.

Darko had run then, and Nigel had been chasing him all fucking night.

He needed to make sure he was gone. Joe’s protection meant nothing where Darko was concerned, because he had agreed with Joe that they let Darko go. He couldn’t have it both ways. He couldn’t have protection but then say he wanted Darko untouched if it was him Nigel needed protection from.

After visiting old haunts, a safe house and two of the women he knew for sure that Darko was fucking, he couldn’t find him.

All through the night and into the day, and now it was nearly six in the evening and for sure Darko must have fucking done the right thing and left the city. Hopefully the country if he had any sense.

Now Nigel’s heart was pounding for different reasons. He’d gone from chasing a man all over town to realising that this was it. It was finally over and he could go home to Aiden.

He took the steps into the apartment building two at a time as he raced towards the reason he had done all this. The reason for him to draw breath every fucking day.

Aiden, his beautiful angel.

Nigel was almost at the apartment when he heard the smashing sound, something breaking with force.

His eyes went to the broken lock a moment before he slammed through the door.

Darko stood in the middle of the room, gun shaking in his hand, a gash across his forehead and Aiden’s fruit bowl smashed on the floor at his feet.

“Look, here comes the fucking hero,” Darko chuckled darkly.

Nigel couldn’t spare a glance at Aiden. As much as he wanted to make sure he was okay he couldn’t look away from Darko’s gun, ready to take a fucking bullet if he had to. Either way, this had to end.

“You sold me out, brother.” Darko growled at Nigel.

“You fucking blackmailed me. You threatened a fucking boy to get me to do what you wanted. Fucking coward.” Nigel replied, the words a rumble of anger. “You deserve worse.”

Randall, he knew, was already back with Alana. He’d called her as soon as Darko had run, getting him out of harm's way and promising to explain everything as soon as he could. He’d likely be a little economical with the truth but the important thing was that Randall was safe.

Darko started to laugh, a desperate sound.

“All this for some fucking freak, right? That’s why you left the job back then? Your fucking freak man-wife wanted you out of the business.”

“No, that’s not how it went, but I’m not about to fucking have this conversation with you.” Nigel spat.

Darko turned to Aiden then, giving Nigel the chance to glance at him. Aiden was standing, defiant with an empty beer bottle in his hand poised to throw. He looked unhurt but Nigel couldn’t let himself feel the relief yet.

“You’re wasting your fucking time.” Darko’s words to Aiden were laced with venom. “He was your everything, right? Because you loved him that much. You were his everything because he was so high he couldn’t be fucked to look for better.”

Darko laughed and Nigel shook his head. It was so far from the truth as to be laughable. He had loved Aiden obsessively, it was only when Aiden left that Nigel had come to his fucking senses and pulled his shit together.

“You know how many girls he’d fuck at the club?” Darko continued, “Now I know why. Better to fuck some really pussy than go home to his freak wife.”

Nigel looked at Aiden again, hoping for some sign that he’d know the lie, that what Darko said had never happened. But his expression, his stance didn’t change. He remained focused on Darko.

And that was good. Darko was just looking to distract them and divide them.

“Lying, like a fucking coward. You need to leave, Darko.” Nigel took a step closer and the gun swung towards him. “I’ve kept Joe off your back. He wanted to kill you. I asked him to let you go. But it’ll just take one phone call.”

“You fucking-” Darko started raising the gun.

The bottle in Aiden's hand went whizzing past Nigel's head, hitting Darko directly in the face. It didn't shatter, Nigel was sure that only happened in the movies. But they both heard the crack as Darko's nose broke. He cried out in pain, gun still in hand as he tried to cup his nose, catching the blood that was streaming.

Nigel charged forward, knocking Darko to the ground and sending the gun skittering across the floor.

Nigel had Darko pinned down and bleeding all over himself before he realised Aiden had moved. But there he was, standing over them, gun now in hand, pointed at Darko.

"If you don't leave now, I will kill you myself." Aiden growled.

Darko laughed, "maybe the girly does have some fucking balls."

Nigel had punched Darko in the face before he even realised it. His fist coming back bloody from Darko's nose.

Nigel stood, both of them towering over him now, and reached for his phone.

"Go Darko. I'll give you a head start, I'll call Joe in an hour. If you don't leave now, then I'm calling him immediately."

Darko staggered to his feet, alternating hysterical laughter and shouting abuse at them. He grabbed a jacket that he must have put on the side of the chair, and then was out the door, dripping blood in his wake.

When they heard his feet on the steps Aiden relaxed and fell into Nigel's arms. Aiden was shaking but Nigel was sure it was as much adrenaline as it was fear.

"Will you call Joe on him?" Aiden asked quietly and Nigel was unsure what answer he wanted to hear.

Nigel shook his head, "no. He's a fuck, and probably would deserve everything coming to him. But that isn't my call to make. I don't want his blood on my hands."

Aiden nodded against him and clung tightly.

"I missed you," Aiden sighed. Nigel kissed his curls.

"I love you," Nigel replied.

Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

It's time to embrace the past and the future.

“To new beginnings,” Santa lifted his glass in a toast and they all raised their own with good cheer in the booth that had been set aside for them. Santa, Bella, Aiden and Viv were all drinking champagne, Nigel had opted for tonic water.

It had been a rough few months. In fact, staying clean every day whilst both temptation and motive were all around him, had been the hardest thing Nigel had ever done. Especially when coupled with the fact that he’d had to cut ties with Aiden.

Now that he was back and staying with Aiden, and everyone was safe, he wasn’t sure he ever wanted to so much as take an aspirin in the future, let alone alcohol or drugs. Even so, he didn’t want to stand in the way of the celebrations, and Aiden’s good friends had insisted on hosting at their bar.

After they all drank in celebration, everyone descended into chatter amongst themselves as Nigel looked on.

It was so surreal.

He had barely even touched on knowing this new life of Aiden’s before he had been pulled away from it all. And to see how much he was loved and the support he had warmed Nigel so much. They were all so welcoming of him too, even Viv.

There had never been any love lost between the two of them, which Nigel fully understood with hindsight. But she had grinned and hugged him and told him that what he had done to make sure that Aiden and Randall were safe warranted a fresh start with her. She had then growled into his ear that if he hurt Aiden she’d fuck him up.

Which he truly believed. And hell, he’d let her. But he had no intention of ever doing anything again that could hurt Aiden.

“You alright?” Aiden spoke softly so that only Nigel could hear him as he ran his hand up Nigel’s thigh.

Nigel pulled on a smile and nodded.

“Just a bit overwhelmed to be honest, gorgeous.” Nigel covered that feeling with his usual charm.

Aiden looked concerned for a moment, so Nigel pulled him close and nuzzled into his hair.

“I’m just tired, darling.”

Aiden nodded and pulled back enough to give him a soft smile. “It has been a crazy few months.”

Darko had gone on the run a week earlier and as far as Nigel could tell without getting too involved, he had made it out of the country and was heading back to Romania. Joe had been good as his word and both Darko and Nigel had walked away with no impediments.

Whilst Aiden had someone come and fix his door, Nigel had gone to see Alana. He had owed her a huge explanation and he had absolutely no expectation of getting his job back. She had listened in appraising silence as Nigel had explained everything, nodding when it got to the parts about Randall as clearly the young man had already told her something of what had happened. In the end, she’d hugged him, called him an idiot and then thanked him for saving Randall’s life.

Randall had a way to go, but he was safe and in rehab, that was all they could do for him for now.

And Alana had insisted he have a week to himself before he come back to work.

Nigel hadn’t been able to refuse, and he didn’t want to.

When he had returned to Aiden’s apartment, the door had been fixed and Aiden welcomed him as he fell into bed. And then he slept. On and off he slept for about two days before finally getting up and having a proper meal and a much needed shower.

And since then, well he had just been pottering around Aiden’s apartment. Aiden had managed to get some short notice time off work but still had to disappear now and then for meetings he hadn’t been able to rearrange. So Nigel spent that time reading through Aiden’s comics, the old ones and then new ones that were currently just sketches on his drawing board.

Nigel’s heart had swelled with each page, so proud of how talented Aiden was. He was going to miss being able to indulge in that when he moved out. He was going to miss snuggling on the sofa and watching terrible daytime TV.

“We can go home if you like?” Aiden broke into Nigel’s thoughts and rubbed his thigh gently again, comforting.

It had been this way since Nigel had returned. Soft, intimate touches and reassurances, but nothing more. He didn’t want to push Aiden and he knew Aiden was conscious of how he was recovering. It had been an ordeal whether Nigel wanted to admit that or not. And as much as he craved Aiden’s support, it was taking a while for that to be something more physical.

Something back to normal. And maybe that would come when they both had their own space again and didn't have the pressure of living in each other's pockets.

Nigel didn't have a chance to reply before Aiden downed the rest of his drink and turned to the group.

"We're going to call it a night. It's been a crazy week and we just need to rest."

Bella gave a soft smile and nodded, "we understand. If you need anything, just pick up the phone. We can drop some groceries over if you need us to. Just… just rest and let everything slot back into place."

Nigel was touched by the words. He really liked both Bella and Santa, the way they were almost parental towards Aiden made him like them all the more.

Aiden nodded and got to his feet, pulling Nigel with them as they all said their goodbyes.

There was an awkwardness hanging over Nigel that he couldn't quite shake and he hated the way it made him feel.

He felt it as soon as Aiden jiggled the key in his now temperamental lock and let them into his apartment.

"Home sweet home," Aiden sighed with a smile as he closed the door behind them.

And that was it, Nigel realised. Aiden had said that earlier too, called this their home. He had been doing so all week. This wasn't back to normal, not for them, not any more. Years ago it might have been, but now? They had technically only just started to get back together when he had left, and now here he was just lingering in Aiden's space without even ever asking. He wanted more than anything for this thing between them to work out, and if he had a choice he would never leave again. But he hadn't given Aiden that choice. All week it had been hanging over him without ever realising what it was.

He had inserted himself back into Aiden's life and never asked if that was okay. This was now, not five years ago. But clearly he was just the same thoughtless asshole he had always been.

Nigel's jaw tightened and he stopped as Aiden started to take off his jacket.

"I should find a new place," Nigel blurted the words. "I just crashed here that first night and I haven't left. I don't want to impose."

Aiden looked at him with a frown, half way through shrugging out of his jacket. The expression was one that Nigel knew well. Aiden had no fucking idea what he was talking about.

"Given that I miraculously still have a job, I need to get my own place. But I can move to a hotel until my first paycheck comes in-" Nigel continued, cut off by the incredulous look on Aiden's face.

“What? What are you talking about?” Aiden’s words were tinged with sadness and anger. And in that moment, Nigel realised that maybe he had read the whole situation completely wrong.

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Aiden felt his pocket, rubbing his fingers over the shape there, the little circle he had been carrying around for so long now.

He had bought the ring after the night they had spent together in that awful hotel. At the time he had needed something to ground him and to give him hope. He knew Nigel was coming back, that he would return to him eventually, but it was so intangible. So Aiden had bought the ring to focus that hope and anticipation.

Even so, he hadn’t known then whether he really meant anything by it. The thought of remarrying Nigel after everything filled him with mixed feelings. The swell of love in his chest was tempered by memories of when they had been married before. And whilst they were both so different now, and their relationship was different too, Aiden couldn’t shake the concern that history would find a way to repeat itself. As wholly unlikely as that was given the particulars of the history in question.

So it had sat in his pocket, or on his night stand, sometimes even on his own finger as he contemplated giving it more meaning than the hypothetical amount that it was already imbued with.

And then Nigel finally returned.

It hadn’t been until after Darko left that Aiden was able to draw breath. It had all happened so fast, and then it was just him and Nigel and the distance between them.

Aiden knew part of that distance came from him. As much as he was overjoyed to have Nigel back, he had now put so much pressure on himself that there was more meaning to this return. And so as Nigel slipped back into his life and his bed, Aiden hesitated to be intimate. He wanted to give Nigel his space to heal and settle back into this life, even as each day passed with him falling ever deeper in love.

Or maybe he had never quite fallen out of love? At least not with those good memories, those perfect parts of Nigel. Like how they could laugh together, how they could tease. The way Nigel had always made him feel so loved.

Aiden had spent nights watching Nigel sleep as he lay exhausted in Aiden’s bed.

He had played the ring over in his hands, reminding himself that in reality they had technically only just gotten back together days before Nigel had left. In fact, had they even got back together? They had been dating, and they slept together.

Any doubts Aiden had about the status of their relationship resolved over the following days as Nigel fit perfectly into his life. It felt so domestic having Nigel in his apartment, but different from how it had been before.

It felt good to have Nigel there, it felt natural and right. And he was sure Nigel felt the same way. There was no mention of him leaving, and Aiden could easily imagine that they would just automatically carry on like this. That slowly, the sexual intimacy would return when Nigel was ready. That Nigel would go back to work and they would just slot around each other as they had years before.

Aiden bit on his lower lip as he saw the confusion in Nigel's expression, his fingers still rubbing against the shape in his pocket even though it brought no comfort.

"You want to leave?" Aiden asked through the lump in his throat, not really wanting to hear the answer.

"No, fuck." Nigel shook his head and took a step towards him before stopping again and shaking his head. "I just… I had nowhere to go and so I came here and it's not fair of me to expect more than that."

Aiden frowned, taking in the words. Did Nigel want to leave because he thought Aiden wanted him to?

"Nigel, do you think I want you to leave?" Aiden's words were shaky.

Nigel shrugged and shook his head again. "You should. You should want your space back and not have me impose just because of what we… our relationship or whatever it is we're doing-"

"Whatever we're *doing*? Whatever it is?" Aiden's throat tightened as he spat the words back at Nigel.

"No, that came out wrong. Fuck. I love you. You know that, I've told you. It's all so fucking confusing…"

Aiden's breath hitched at the words, remembering the countless times he had anticipated gay panic from his ex-husband and terrified now that this was the case.

"Maybe you *should* go," Aiden muttered, "until it's all less confusing for you."

Nigel's jaw tightened and he looked pained. Aiden hated that his words had hurt, but what else could he have said?

"*You* don't confuse me, Aiden." Nigel replied, anger in his tone. The same tone he had used when they were married and had a rare falling out. It made Aiden shudder. "I fucking love you, that's what's confusing. Because technically we've only just started dating, not because of anything else. We're only just starting something but I'm so fucking in love with you."

Aiden blinked, his mouth opened but no words came out. Was Nigel saying exactly what he had been thinking?

"I want to fucking stay, angel. Of course I do. But this isn't five years ago, we-"

“We’re in love.” Aiden finally found his words. “And we might have only just been dating, but we had been talking a lot longer than that. I’ve been falling back in love with you a lot longer than that.”

Nigel took another step closer and let out a shuddering breath.

“Fuck, same for me angel.”

“And I can’t pretend that the past doesn’t count for something. No matter who we were and how it ended, that all still counts, the good times as well as the bad.” Aiden explained, his palms a little sweaty as nerves crept in.

Nigel nodded his agreement and Aiden took in a breath. He felt the shape against his thigh and then reached into his pocket.

“Nigel, I want you to stay.” Aiden said, trying to keep the tremble from his lips as he pulled the ring from his pocket. He closed the distance between them in a short stride and then knelt down on one knee. “I want you to marry me.”

Aiden hadn’t expected to do this, not tonight and possibly not anytime soon. But it felt right. It felt like the time and the place. It was make or break, now or never.

“Fuck,” the word left Nigel’s mouth as though it had been punched out of him.

They looked at each other for a long moment, long enough for Aiden’s nerves to jangle as he anticipated the worst.

“Fuck, angel.” Nigel sounded choked up as he dropped to his knees, his hands taking hold of Aiden’s face and pressing their mouths together in a hungry kiss.

Minutes passed until they both pulled back, breathing and shaking.

“Yes, I want to marry you. I want to stay here and forget that we were ever a-fucking-part. I can’t live without you, I never could.” Nigel breathed the words just above Aiden’s mouth before he kissed him again.

Aiden could feel the tears rolling down his cheeks, relief and happiness mixed together. Nigel wiped Aiden’s tears away when they pulled back again, smiling at each other as Aiden slipped the ring onto Nigel’s finger.

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Nigel moaned as he moved over Aiden, sliding within him in a way he knew he would always relish no matter how many times they did this.

With the ring slipped on his finger, Nigel had picked Aiden up from the floor and carried him into the bedroom. They had both only managed to strip off enough clothes to make it possible to do this. To make love.

Aiden whimpered and writhed, his shirt half undone and trousers off, his boxers wrapped around one still-socked foot. Nigel wasn't sure where either of their shoes had gone, nor all the buttons on his own shirt as he had practically ripped it off.

His jeans and boxers were pulled down to his thighs, all he was able to manage as Aiden had spread his legs and started to touch himself.

Nigel had practically salivated, watching as Aiden stoked his t-cock between two fingers, getting visibly wetter by the moment.

It was with a grunt, Nigel had pushed into him. Still a little too dry at first, but when he had tried to pull back out, Aiden had stopped him and pulled him closer.

The issue was quickly resolved as Aiden grew wetter with every slow thrust.

"You're perfect," Nigel muttered, feeling like he might lose his mind to the sensation. He had never thought he would have this again, with anyone. After his marriage had ended he had never expected to find someone he would connect with on this level, that would make sex feel this good. And now he had.

It was different, it was better. It was more than it had ever been.

"I'm not going to last," the words left Nigel in a rush as the realisation hit him, his climax swelling.

Aiden nodded, biting his lower lip and making a face that Nigel knew so well that it made him smile.

He couldn't tear his eyes away from the beautiful sight as he started to move deeper, faster.

Aiden's breaths became gasps as he hitched his legs up around Nigel's waist, pulling him deeper.

"So close…" Aiden muttered.

"I know," Nigel couldn't help grinning in response, knowing Aiden's body so well. Nigel reached between them and stroked his thumb over Aiden's cock.

Aiden tensed, clenching around Nigel's cock and pulling in a deep breath that he let out on a long groan.

They moved together, bodies rocking as Nigel thrust deep inside his fiance. Aiden met each thrust, pushing his hips so that he was grinding against Nigel's hand as well as his crotch.

"Fuck, yes… oh god…" Aiden muttered, breathless.

Despite knowing it was imminent, Nigel was startled by the sudden tightness around him as Aiden cried out and came. He could feel Aiden's body pulling him in, wanting him deeper, right where he belonged.

Nigel thrust a few more times, deep and slow, before holding it there. As far inside Aiden as he could go, he began to grind against him, short and sharp thrusts that had Aiden's body jerking as his breath was forced out of him.

Aiden's fingers dug into his shoulders, as he threw his head back and released unintelligible words.

Nigel stroked his cock again, feeling it throb against his fingers before Aiden cried out and shuddered, curling over as far as he could with Nigel between his thighs, as his entire body constricted with a second climax.

Unsure how the hell he'd managed to last through the first one, Nigel came. He groaned and buried his face in the crook of Aiden's neck as his cock pulsed and throbbed, filling Aiden with his seed.

"Fuuuuuuck," Nigel groaned, oversensitive as the aftershocks of Aiden's orgasms continued to milk his cock until he was sure his balls were completely dry.

Until he collapsed entirely on top of Aiden.

They breathed together, wrapped up in each other and desperate to never let each other go. And now they knew that they never needed to. They could have this, start over, start fresh. Rekindle old love, find new reasons to love each other. It could be every good thing that it had before and more.

"I don't want to ever miss you again." Aiden sobbed out the words as he clutched onto Nigel.

"You'll never need to," Nigel promised.

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